

## **NAMIWALKS HOSTS ITS 2012 TEAM CAPTAIN KICK-OFF LUNCHEON** **By Kimberli Washington, Public Information Office**



The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) hosted its annual Los Angeles County NAMIWalks Team Captain kick-off luncheon on Thursday, August 9, 2012 at the California Endowment. This year's theme is "Changing Minds One Step at a Time," and the NAMIWalks event takes place at the Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica on Saturday, October 6, 2012.



The purpose of the kick-off luncheon is to provide the captains with the necessary tools needed to successfully build teams, fundraise and increase

community awareness about the services offered by NAMI. Participants included NAMI members, LACDMH employees, agencies, faith-based groups and businesses throughout the county. This year, a tree was added to the symbolic shoe centerpiece traditionally placed on each table, to represent the continual growth of NAMI.

“The goal of NAMIWalks is to de-sensitize the stigma, increase social inclusion and public awareness. Mental illness is just like any other illness that needs treatment,” stated Wayne Baldaro, Walk Manager, NAMIWalks Los Angeles.



Presentations on their successful fundraising efforts were given by previous team captains. This year's speakers included Cathy Williamson (NAMI Long Beach), Dori Baron and Mitzi Wright (NAMI Westside), Tim and Debbie Watkins (NAMI Pomona Valley), and Keris Jän Myrick (Project Return Peer Support Network). The captains each shared the impact that NAMIWalks has on their communities, and different approaches they take to fundraising and raising awareness.

“It's about the ‘ask’ and reaching out to people about who we are and what we do for the community. Things don't change unless you mobilize the masses,” stated Charlie Hearn, NAMIWalks Walk Committee Chair.



Each table participated in a group activity on strategies, coaching teams and communication techniques they would use in 2012 and volunteers were asked to share their table's ideas with everyone. Raffle prizes were given to attendees, as well as details on a fundraising incentive contest to win one of four vacation packages for registered participants who donate \$50 or more by August 31, 2012.

To show his appreciation, Walk Manager Wayne Baldaro ended the luncheon with a heartfelt YouTube video entitled "The Gratitude Dance," which features a young man that travels across the world doing a choreographed dance with natives of each destination. The video symbolized the positive change each team captain makes by educating their communities and increasing awareness of NAMI services to erase the stigma of mental illnesses.